"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin

Published by The Christian Rural Fellowship, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York 10, N. Y.

nber 114 June, 1946

The Challenge of Tomorrow's Rural Life*

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ABSTRACT

Extraordinary population changes presage the urbanization of rural areas, the elimination of most distinctions between urban and rural, and the building of the mechanized rural community. This has come about as a result of the revolution in transportation, especially the automobile and paved road; the changes in communication; the commercialization and mechanization of farming; the mechanization of the rural home; changes in rural social institutions, especially in the school and in government.

Will these changes usher into the rural America of Tomorrow the attractive living possibilities that are there? Problems that demand attention, if such is to be, have to do with rural community organization; the preservation of the family-sized farm; attention to small farmers and farm laborers; the psychological effect of urbanization on rural institutions; rural avocational interests; and the rural population trends.

Tomorrow's Rural Life Will Be Different From Today's

During the last quarter century, quiet yet dramatic changes have been going on in rural America to such an extent that tomorrow's rural life will be radically different from today's. These changes will probably make our rural areas, indeed our whole pattern of living, as different in the next decades as did the Industrial Revolution of the past two centuries. These changes began no longer than three decades ago but have been accumulating with every passing year. Just now they are temporarily diverted by the war and post-war adjustments. This means, however, only the building of a head of steam that will give them a tremendous surge in this post-war period.

Rural Population Has Increased Rapidly

The unmistakable evidence of these changes is shown by two shifts in our population. Between 1920 and 1940, the farms of the nation lost over one million residents. The number of farms decreased by 350,000. The number of acres

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making for change. Electricity is the instrument. In 1930 less than 15 per cent of our farm homes used electricity. In January, 1944, 45 per cent of the six million farm homes and 60 per cent of the total 16 million rural homes had this power source. Post-war plans call for an extension of power lines that will bring electricity to almost every rural region. Some of the greatest limitations to convenient rural and farm home life are on the way out completely. Electrically operated washing and ironing units, adequate lighting, running hot and cold water, and quick freezing and storage refrigerators mean that families need not fear to take up residence in rural areas because desired facilities cannot be used. The rural delivery truck will supply any other needs such as bakery, butcher and cleaning services.

Institutional Development

But the factors behind this revolution are not solely material changes. Social inventions are revolutionizing the institutional patterns of rural life and integrating rural and urban.

Central Schools

American tradition has always included the wish that all youth have a chance at a well-rounded and properly founded education. Rural parents often moved to the larger centers to obtain it for their children. City residents would not move to rural areas because they could not get it. Now this opportunity is present in the rural areas also. The centralized school is one of the most important social inventions of our times, for it introduced a practical and high quality elementary and secondary education system into village and open country life. The growth in the number of such schools has been as phenomenal as the other changes in rural life. One illustration will emphasize this. In 1925, 15,000 schools used 26,685 busses to drive 875,000 children a one-way distance of 316,000 miles to such schools. Only fifteen years later three times as many schools used almost four times the number of busses to transport four million children a one-way distance of 1,250,000 miles to these schools. Today rural children are taught in open-country, village or city schools that begin to equal the urban schools and what disadvantages still remain are rapidly being eliminated.

Government In Rural Areas

Beginning in the late twenties and increasingly rapidly up to the present time, the Federal government, because of economic crisis, regional weather difficulties, and the war, has moved into new areas of control in rural territory. Through a number of agencies contacting rural life directly, such as the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, Federal Emergency Relief Administration, National Youth Administration, Civilian Conservation Corps, and others, new policies in the field of public welfare, public works, farm production-control, and the readjustment of people to the land have been introduced. Rural people now have a new consciousness of the Federal government. It extends to the remotest areas for government contacts have been wider and more intimate than many suspect. Whether the consequence will be for the rural people to expect help with every problem that arises and thus display a paralysis of effort, cannot be predicted but the stage is set very definitely for government to play a role in rural affairs hitherto unknown.

Here then is a series of revolutionary changes in transportation, in communication, in the commercialization and mechanization of farming, in the mechanization of the home, in education, in the economic operations of rural

people, and in rural government which already has led to tremendous changes in rural life. Their future influences will probably be even more dramatic than those that have been suggested. There is in creation then and to a considerable extent already here, what can be the most attractive dwelling environment in our land, namely the mechanized rural community.

Will These Changes Bring A Better Rural Life?

Will these changes lead us in the rural America of Tomorrow to this most attractive prospect? If so, the task ahead is to bring about a realization of the interrelatedness of all these forces so that coordination in rural affairs may be developed as they unfold. To suggest that this is the task assumes that social cooperation is desirable and possible, not intolerable and impractical. This does not mean that some super-group will project a master plan into which the rural areas must be fitted. It does mean that the agencies working for and with rural people must project themselves into the future with well-ordered thought toward definite ends, modifiable to meet contingencies, but capable of establishing the basic structure around which this mechanized community can be organized. To do this means to proceed with mastery and not simply to drift.

What then are some of the problems which it can now be seen will demand planning as a result of these revolutionary changes in our rural areas?

Community Organization Is Paramount.

It is possible that these social changes may destroy the rural community, that is, destroy the sense of oneness existing in the thinking and behavior of the rural people. The movement into rural territory of urban people is introducing a heterogeneity of population types with widely different interests than those expressed by the farm and village residents. A new class structure is being evolved both from the addition of these new inhabitants and within the farming group itself. Special interests are being sharpened by the specializations in agriculture and within the new residents in these territories. The dairy farmer has a set of unique problems, for example, not shared by the fruit farmer and both of these have particular problems with which the non-farm resident thinks he is not concerned at all. The new non-farm resident may not transfer his own basic interests from the city to the rural situation in which he is now a dweller. He may reside in rural territory yet never truly become a part of it in the community sense. In other words new inhabitants and new farm groupings may result in a dividing of rural communities into a series of antagonistic special interest classes.

Here is a challenge. We have never taken seriously and, therefore, have never educated consistently for "community" living. In the formative periods of our rural development, community was a reality because of occupational, nationality and cultural homogeneity. New arrivals, urbanization, unstable forms of work, new institutions, and new government activities made impossible a fixed structure. The pursuit of individual interests made many blind to common interests except in periods of crisis, so we have failed to educate for "communal" life. Now there is the threat of destroying what "community" there is. With proper planning, however, there are those who can see consolidated rural communities large enough to support all the modern

institutions required by rural residents. The very problems created by these new situations should encourage such cooperation.

Farming Must Not Be Minimized

What of the major occupation in rural areas? Many predict that these new social forces will eliminate the family-sized farm for the large mechanized and corporate farm and that the new rural dwellers will increase part-time and subsistence farming. If we use as a rough indication of family-sized farms those between 20 and 499 acres, it can be pointed out that between 1920 and 1940, these farms decreased in number in the United States by 14 per cent. On the other hand farms of less than 20 acres increased in number 34 per cent, while those of 500 acres or more increased 22 per cent. Farm mechanization will make for larger units of operation requiring greater capital outlays and more farm laborers. As a consequence commercial farming will call for more skillful operators, financiers, and marketing experts. Commercial agriculture will, indeed, already does, demand scientific knowledge and business acumen comparable to that required in urban business. Those who survive will undoubtedly enjoy larger incomes, higher standards of living, and a social class position comparable to business and professional workers. If farm machinery is built, and much already has, that will fit the demands of the family-farm unit efficiently and economically, the fear of the abnormal growth of large corporate farms may be unwarranted. But the selective process will eliminate the inefficient commercial farmers and probably drop them into the farm labor class or other occupations.

Farm Class Differences Must Not Be Sharpened

Here is an important problem. Rural environments can be injured decidedly by the development of a poverty-stricken class of farm workers. While there is being created a more prosperous farm operator, there must not be created a more impoverished farm laborer. Regulations covering housing, health facilities, and other imperative needs for the farm laborer can be devised. An important question is whether social security and unemployment benefits need to be expanded to include these workers.

Small Farming Must Be Given Attention.

In 1940, approximately one in each six farms in this country was less than 20 acres in size. These are chiefly noncommercial units of the part-time, residence, or subsistence variety. They do not produce over ten per cent of our agricultural products. The part-time farmers have occupations from which they earn their basic living but supplement this with small farming operations. Subsistence farmers give their major attention to their farm work and depend upon it for a living. The small residence farmer is near the retirement age. Planning for these groupings must include supplementary employment, social security, old age benefits, health, hospitalization and medical care, together with improvements in education, avocational interests and recreation.

The planning of public works programs for rural areas to supplement the resources of these workers, if they cannot be absorbed in part-time

private industrial enterprises, is essential. Work on rural public buildings, schools and roads or helping to install village and small city public utilities such as water systems can be projected.

These farm labor and small farmer groupings will become increasingly important in our rural scheme. The basic philosophical conception about farming from our past history is that the laborer and the tenant should climb the agricultural ladder to farm ownership. Now commercial agriculture will make this impossible for many. We have no ideational objectives for them. Aside from the mere physical requirements of living, they must have spiritual support lest they become disillusioned and fatalistic.

Our greatest danger of developing rural slums where pockets of impoverished farm laborers and residence and subsistence farmers exist back in hills and in the poor land areas lies just here. In this respect rural churches, rural schools, extension and social workers can play an important role.

Rural Institutions Must Achieve Integration

And what of the institutions of rural life, the school, the church, and rural government? The basic question here is whether the urban mentality will submerge the rural and push it into a position of subordination. If we did not expect the development of a strong farm class that will militantly protect the interests of village and farm people, we would surely feel that this also is a grave danger. But we anticipate more emphatic expression from this population just because they will see their problems more vividly. The individualistic farmer may have learned that the general well-being transcends personal and individual wishes while the new migrant from the city may see the unity and interrelatedness of the common interests. Here there must be wise thinking or conflicts will be sharp. For example while the school curriculum must provide opportunity for agricultural training and farm living it must also prepare for urban and industrial occupations. These can be coordinated and rural education made more valuable than ever.

Rural Church Must Develop Centralization

The rural church, for example, will be decidedly influenced by these new residents who will want or should be stimulated to want to participate in the church program. They will be from all faiths, thus increasing the heterogeneity of religious expression in the rural areas. While they will bring new support in wealth and numbers, this can add to competition between the churches, for it gives a little added strength to each of the many already operating units. The rural school has centralized and founded an effective and efficient educational institution. If the rural church is to be as significant an institution as it can be with rural people, it, too, must follow some plan for constructive centralization whereby people of different religious affiliations can work together in a common effort and be better friends. If this is not possible, many of these new residents who do not find their denomination in the community will not relate themselves to the church at all. In this process of finding an effective integration, the extension counselors can give much help.

Rural people much more than urban have depended upon their own efforts for avocational pursuits. Now the radio, the dance hall and the movies are

available. Will this use of home talent die out or will they spread to the new residents and help to weave them into the community in more wholesome and pleasurable manner?

Rural Population Policies

A final area of extreme importance to the whole of our national life has to do with our population. The rural areas and especially the farm population has been the seed-bed of the human race. For centuries it has been the excess population from the farms that have maintained the urban populations. In 1930 to 1940, the net reproduction rates among rural women were double those of urban women, and the rates for the farm women were considerably more than double. Seven out of each ten children reared in rural areas must find employment in industrial activities or be added to unemployment rolls, or become dependents in the rural areas.

Our country has no national population policy. Perhaps it cannot have, but population changes are at the root of many of our most serious problems. If a national policy should call for an increasing population, then, unless immigration laws are changed decidedly, birth rates must increase considerably and the rural and farm rates must be maintained, yes, even increased. But with the rural acceptance of urban mores, this is not at all likely. In fact, the evidence is in the opposite direction. Between 1910 and 1940 the net adjusted rate of reproduction per 1,000 farm women in this country dropped from 2,022 to 1,661, a decrease of 361 or 18 per cent. This decrease is numerically greater than that for either the rural non-farm or the urban women. The urbanization of rural areas is followed by a decrease in the rural birth rates. Although this might result in an increase in the rural standard of living, in a decrease in excess population in the rural areas to migrate to urban territory, and in cutting down the excess labor supply, it eventually means contributing even more rapidly to the anticipated national population decline.

Printed in the U. S. A.